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BLIVEN LAW FIRM, P.C. KALISPELL, NT 50901 Michael A. Bliven Kraig W. Moore BLIVEN LAW FIRM, P.C. 278 Fourth Avenue E.N. Kalispell, MT 59901 Telephone: (406) 755-6828

Attorney for Plaintiff

CLERK OF DISTRICT COURT .

2017 NOV 17 PX 4:31

FILED

BY

DEPUTY

MONTANA ELEVENTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT, FLATHEAD COUNTY

VICTORIA J. LAHTI,

Plaintiff,

V

LIBERTY MUTUAL GROUP INC.; d/b/a SAFECO INSURANCE, and SAFECO INSURANCE COMPANY OF ILLINOIS.

Defendant.

Cause No. OV - 17 - 1171 B

ROBERT B ALLISON

COMPLAINT, REQUEST FOR DECLARATORY JUDGMENT, and DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

COMES NOW, Plaintiff, Victoria J. Lahti, and hereby complains and allege as follows, based upon information and belief:

- 1. Jurisdiction for this cause lies within the State of Montana, in that the collision and injuries, which are the subject of this Complaint, occurred within the State of Montana.
- 2. This cause arises from a motor vehicle accident involving Plaintiff and two other automobiles, which occurred on or about August 24, 2015.
- 3. At all material times herein, Defendant Liberty Mutual Group Inc., also doing business in the State of Montana as SAFECO Insurance and SAFECO Insurance Company of Illinois (hereinafter collectively "Liberty Mutual"), is and was qualified to do business in the State of Montana. Liberty Mutual sold insurance policies and collected premiums for those policies, thus doing business in the State of Montana and purposefully availing

COMPLAINT, REQUEST FOR DECLARATORY JUDGMENT PAGE 1

itself to the laws, jurisdiction, and courts of Montana. All insurance policies at issue were sold within the State of Montana to Montana citizens and residents.

- 4. At all material times, Plaintiff was a resident of Flathead County, Montana.
- 5. At all material times, Defendant Liberty Mutual insured Plaintiff, Victoria Lahti under an underinsured motorist (UIM) policy.
- 6. At all material times, the owner and driver of the vehicle that struck Plaintiff, Guy Ray Emett (hereinafter "Emett"), was a resident of Montana.
- 7. At all material times herein, Emett was insured.
- 8. Plaintiff's economic damages alone exceed the policy limits of Emett's underlying policies.
- 9. Plaintiff's economic damages alone, of which proof of loss has been submitted to Defendant Liberty Mutual and request for payment made, far exceed the UIM policy limits that Defendant Liberty Mutual has represented that the Plaintiff had purchased.
- 10. Despite these facts, Defendant Liberty Mutual continues to deny coverage and continues to refuse to make payment after ongoing and repeated requests.

FACTS COMMON TO ALL COUNTS

- 11. Plaintiff re-alleges the allegations contained in paragraphs 1 through 10.
- 12. On or about August 24, 2015, Plaintiff was driving westbound on W. Center Street, in Kalispell, Montana, when the car in front of her stopped for a crossing construction crew. Plaintiff came to a stop. As she was stopped, Emett failed to stop and collided with the rear of Plaintiff's car, causing Plaintiff to subsequently collide with the car in front of her. A copy of the Crash Investigator's Report is attached as Exhibit 1.
- 13. Plaintiff complained of pain at the scene of the accident. See Exhibit 1.

COMPLAINT, REQUEST FOR DECLARATORY JUDGMENT, DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL PAGE 2

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14.	On September 2, 2015, Plaintiff visited Dr. Annie Bukacek at Hosanna Health Care in					
•	Kalispell, Montana. As a result of Plaintiff's injuries from her motor vel	hicle accident, D				
	Bukacek excused Plaintiff from work until September 16, 2015.					

- 15. Plaintiff was released to work on September 16, 2015, but she continued to experience neck pain from her accident.
- 16. On October 21, 2015, Plaintiff experienced a work-related back injury that was precipitated by her accident injuries. Dr. Bukacek excused her from work until October 28, 2015, at which time she was released to return.
- 17. On November 4, 2015, Plaintiff was excused from work until further notice due to symptoms her treating physician described as "debilitating".
- 18. On November 23, 2015, Dr. Bukacek attributed Plaintiff's symptoms, which were characterized as significant neck pain, headaches, foggy thinking, and difficulty concentrating, to her motor vehicle accident and not her work-related back injury.
- 19. As of November 24, 2015, Plaintiff had missed a total of fourteen workdays in the month of November 2015 alone.
- 20. On December 11, 2015, Dr. Bukacek opined that, due to Plaintiff's debilitating headaches, neck pain, and cognitive decline resulting from her motor vehicle accident, Plaintiff could return to work but only in a different employment position that had fewer physical demands.

COUNT I

REQUEST FOR DECLARATORY JUDGMENT

- 21. Plaintiff hereby re-alleges the allegations set forth in paragraphs 1 through 20.
- 22. Plaintiff, pursuant to Sec. 27-8-201, MCA et. seq., and Rule 57 M.R.Civ.P, brings this

COMPLAINT, REQUEST FOR DECLARATORY JUDGMENT, DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL PAGE 3

BLIVEN LAW FIRM, P.C. KALISPELL, MT 59901 action for declaratory judgment for the Court to declare that Defendant Liberty Mutual has to pay for Plaintiff's expenses in excess of the at-fault driver's insurance policy limits.

- 23. Plaintiff requests this Honorable Court to declare that Defendant Liberty Mutual is obligated to make necessary payment of economic damages to Plaintiff pursuant to the Montana Supreme Court's holdings in Ridley v. Guaranty National Insurance (1997), 286 Mont. 325, 951 P.2d 987, Dubray v. Farmers, Watters v. Guaranty National Insurance Co., Shilhanek v. D-2 Trucking, and interpreting and applying MCA 33-18-201.
- 24. Plaintiff has made repeated and ongoing requests for Defendant Liberty Mutual to pay all the benefits Plaintiff is entitled to under the UIM provisions of the policy/policies, pursuant to *Ridley, Dubray, Watters* and *Shilhanek*, as well as other coverages and stacked coverages under *Hardy v. State Farm*, 2003 MT 85 (Mont. 2003); *Dempsey v. Allstate*, 2004 MT 391 (Mont. 2004); and *Swanson v. Hartford*, 2002 MT 81 (Mont. 2002).
- 25. Defendant Liberty Mutual has failed to make the requested payments, and continues to refuse to make the requested payments, instead engaging in ongoing demands and asserting claimed policy provisions contrary to Montana law and the decisions of the Montana Supreme Court, public policy, and reasonable consumer expectations.
- 26. Plaintiff requires additional treatment and has a loss of earning capacity noted by her treating physicians and providers.
- 27. Plaintiff could not perform her past work requirements, has been forced to change her employment position, and needs wage replacement under *Dubray*.

COMPLAINT, REQUEST FOR DECLARATORY JUDGMENT, DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL PAGE 4

- 28. Despite clear liability and damages, Defendant Liberty Mutual has failed to accept liability in this action, failed to affirm coverage in a timely fashion.
- 29. Defendant Liberty Mutual has failed to pay the benefits requested or to provide a timely explanation to requests for payment.
- 30. Plaintiff is an innocent victim of an automobile collision, and Plaintiff will suffer the kind of hardship and devastation to her income and health as addressed by Montana law, yet Defendant Liberty Mutual continues to refuse to make payment.
- 31. Defendant Liberty Mutual has failed to pay under the above case without condition or release. In fact, Defendant Liberty Mutual refused to make payment and continues to do so, after it has clearly been established that Plaintiff has additional wage loss and economic damages beyond the underlying policy limits.
- 32. Defendant Liberty Mutual has either sold policies with illusory coverage to its insureds, or has failed to provide coverage for which it sold policies and coverage.
- 33. Defendant Liberty Mutual has paid pursuant to *Ridley* and *Dubray* under similar circumstances as presented in this case.
- 34. Plaintiff requests that the Court enter judgment against Defendant Liberty Mutual on the above issues, and order them to make payment of damages previously submitted to Defendant Liberty Mutual but not paid to Plaintiff, without condition, delay, or release, with interest.

COUNT II

UNFAIR TRADE PRACTICES ACT

- 35. Plaintiff hereby re-alleges the allegations set forth in paragraphs 1 through 34.
- 36. Plaintiff offered to settle the claim with Defendant Liberty Mutual for the policy limits,

COMPLAINT AND REQUEST FOR DECLARATORY JUDGMENT PAGE 5

and Defendant Liberty Mutual confirmed receipt of the offer on October 25, 2016.

- 37. Defendant Liberty Mutual offered to settle the claim for \$7,000.
- 38. Defendant Liberty Mutual's settlement offer was neither fair nor reasonable in light of Plaintiffs damages, which far exceeded the policy limits.
- 39. On November 11, 2016, Plaintiff rejected Defendant Liberty Mutual's settlement offer because it was neither fair nor reasonable. Plaintiff again offered to settle the claim for the UIM policy limits.
- 40. Defendant Liberty Mutual owed a duty to conduct a reasonable investigation based upon all available information before refusing to make requsted payment on a claim, in accordance with Mont. Code Ann. § 33-18-201(4).
- 41. Defendant Liberty Mutual violated that duty by failing to conduct a complete investigation based upon Plaintiffs individual claim and specific circumstances, before denying benefits requested, in violation of Mont. Code Ann. § 33-18-201(4).
- 42. Defendant Liberty Mutual owed a duty to affirm or deny coverage of claims within a reasonable time after proof of loss statements have been completed, according to Mont. Code Ann. § 33-18-201(5).
- 43. Defendant Liberty Mutual violated that duty when it failed to affirm or deny coverage within a reasonable time after Plaintiff provided proof of loss, in violation of Mont. Code Ann. § 33-18-201(5). Instead, Liberty Mutual invoked delay tactics by delaying responses to communications from Plaintiff, and failing to act on Plaintiffs claim.
- 44. Defendant Liberty Mutual owed a duty to attempt in good faith to effectuate prompt, fair, and equitable settlement of Plaintiffs claim where liability has become reasonably clear, according to Mont. Code Ann. § 33-18-201(6).

COMPLAINT AND REQUEST FOR DECLARATORY JUDGMENT PAGE 6

BLIVEN LAW FIRM, P.C.

KAUSPELL, MT 59901

Defendant Liberty Mutual violated that duty when it neglected in good faith to effectuate
a prompt, fair, and equitable settlement of Plaintiffs' claim after liability became
reasonably clear, in violation of Mont Code Ann. § 33-18-201(6). Liberty Mutual instead
chose to invoke denial and delay tactics by requesting unnecessary, irrelevant, and
superfluous documentation from the Plaintiffs, as well as delaying responses to
communications from Plaintiff, failing to act on Plaintiffs claim, refusing to provide
requested reasonable explanation of the basis in the insurance policy for the denial of the
claim or offer to settle in violation of Mont. Code Ann. § 33-18-201(6). Defendant has
further refused to make reasonable payment under UIM coverage, in violation of 33-18-
201(6) and Dubray v. Farmers Insurance Exchange, 2001 MT 251, 307 Mont. 134, 36
P.3d 897 (Mont. 2001); Shilhanek v. D-2 Trucking, Inc., 2003 MT 122, 315 Mont. 519,
70 P.3d 721 (Mont. 2003), Ridley v. Guaranty Nat. Ins. Co., 286 Mont. 325, 951 P.2d
987 (Mont. 1997); and Watters v. Guaranty National Insurance Co., 2000 MT 150, 300
Mont. 91, 3 P.3d 626 (Mont. 2000).

- 46. Defendant Liberty Mutual had a duty to provide a reasonable explanation of the basis in the insurance policy in relation to the facts or applicable law for the denial of a claim or for the offer of a compromise settlement, in accordance with § 33-18-201(14), MCA.
- 47. Defendant Liberty Mutual violated that duty by failing to provide a reasonable explanation, for the denial of Plaintiff's claim or offer to settle, in violation of § 33-18-201(14), MCA.
- 48. Defendant Liberty Mutual has made it a pattern of its practices and behavior in handling and adjusting Plaintiff's claim to violate Sec. 33-18-201, MCA; Sec. 33-18-242, MCA; and its common law duties of good faith and fair dealing and fiduciary duties with its

COMPLAINT AND REQUEST FOR DECLARATORY JUDGMENT PAGE 7 insureds, by continuing to deny payments when proof of damages have been well established and properly submitted. This behavior is not consistent with its fiduciary duties to the victims of its insured and Sections 33-18-201 and 242, MCA, and in violation of the reasonable expectations of the victims of its insureds and the Defendant's own advertising representations and promises.

- 49. Plaintiff has been injured by Defendant Liberty Mutual's improper actions in that she has been further victimized and unable pay her bills, or provide for herself for a period of time.
- 50. Plaintiff has suffered severe emotional distress and humiliation, as well as an extreme fear of financial hardship, as a result of Defendant Liberty Mutual's unfair claim settlement practices, and she is entitled to payment of these additional actual damages pursuant to Mont. Code Ann. § 33-18-242(1), (4), and Lorang v. Fortis Insurance Company (2008), 345 Mont. 12, 192 P.3d 186.
- 51. Defendant Liberty Mutual's actions constitute fraud and/or malice, and it should be required to pay exemplary damages in accordance with Mont. Code Ann. § 27-1-221.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs pray for judgment against Defendant Liberty Mutual as follows:

- 1. For all general and compensatory damages proved and awarded by the jury or court;
- 2. For all special damages proved and awarded by the jury or court;
- 3. For all other damages allowed by law and awarded by the jury;
- 4. For Plaintiff's costs and disbursements in this action; and
- 5. That the Court declare Defendant Liberty Mutual's responsibility to pay for all damages, including reasonable attorneys fees, which have resulted from its untimely denial of payment for any and all policy provisions.

COMPLAINT AND REQUEST FOR DECLARATORY JUDGMENT PAGE 8

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BLIVEN LAW FIRM, P.C.

KALISPELL MT 58901

- 6. That the Court declare Defendant Liberty Mutual's responsibility to make payment of wage loss and other economic damages expenses. Payment shall include reasonable attorneys fees, which have resulted in Defendant Liberty Mutual's denial of payment under the policy provisions for UIM coverage, and requests made pursuant to Montana law, including Ridley, Dubray, Watters, and Shilhanek.
- 7. That the Defendants be required to effectuate a fair, equitable and prompt settlement as to the additional damages set forth herein
- 8. For Plaintiff's reasonable attorney fees and costs as provided under Montana law including Sec. 27-8-313, MCA, Renville, Buxbaum, Brewer and Mlekush.
- 9. For pre-judgment interest at the rate of 10% per annum and post-judgment interest at the rate of 10% per annum.
- 10. For such other and further relief as the Court deems just and equitable under the circumstances.

JURY DEMAND

1. Plaintiff hereby demands a jury trial on all claims triable by right.

Dated: November 17, 2017

BLIVEN LAW FIRM, P.C.

Michael A. Bliven

278 Fourth Avenue East North

Kalispell, MT 59901

Attorneys for Plaintiffs

By:

MONTANA VEHICLE CRASH REPORT Montana Highway Petrol 2550 PROSPECT AVE HELENA, MT 59620

Crash Number P067-01019-01	Reporting Agency KALISPELL POLICE DEPA	RTMENT	Report 2015	ing Agency Case Number Report 21233 2015	ing Agency CAD Number ORI -21233 MT0150300
CRASH IDENTIFIERS					
Gounty of Crash FLATHEAD (07)	Cily KÄLISPELL ()		Cresh Dale/Time 08/24/2015 11:38		3 AM 08/24/2015 11:40 AM
On Scene Date/Time 08/24/2015 11:44 AM	Cleared Scene Date/Time 08/24/2015 12:16 PM	Complete Date/Time 08/24/2015 12:16 PM	Reason (if Investig	galion Not Complete)	Source of information KALISPELL POLICE DEPARTMENT
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Owner Phone Number (406) 360-2652		istrance Company JEICO		Insurance Policy Number 4143879288	Insurance Broker or Agent
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Owner Phone Number (971) 338-8654	Owner Phone Number (other)	Insurance Comp	any			Instrance Policy Number M1701270	lasu	ance Broke	ror Agent
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P067-01019-01	Kalispell Police Department		[2U15-	21233	2015-21233	1	טטנטפרט ואו
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NO Violation Type Issued	Number Viol	TEST NOT ation Description	I GIVEN	, .			
MCA Specialists		8-302(1) [1] CARE	ELESS DRIVING		·		
DRIVER VO2	NM# Vehicle# Person T	ype Deleli					``
Person Type DRIVER First Name	Middle Name	Lasi Name	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·		1Suffix	Date of Birth	Ade Sex
VICTORIA Address	JEAN Address Other	LAHTI	<u> </u>	City		02/01/1956 State	Age Sex F
1045 CONRAD DR #113 Phone Number	<u>[</u>	ndition at Time of Cn	geh	City KALISPE	LL	MT	59901
(971) 338-8654 Driver License Number	1 AF	PARENTLY NOF	MAL	<u> </u>	Status		
0206719664101	02/01/2021 MT C	2 NON-C	DL DRIVER'S LI		VALID LICENSE License Restrictions 3	·	CALLED TO WAR
Drivers License Restrictions 1 NONE	Drivers License NONE			NONE	License Restrictions 3	· · ·	
Driver Distracted By NOT DISTRACTED	·	(V	river Vision Obstruc /ISION NOT OBS	CURED			
Driver Actions at Time of Cresh 1 (based NO CONTRIBUTING ACTION		N	<u>IO CONTRIBUTI</u>	NG ACTION	on judgement of invest		
Driver Actions at Time of Crash 3 (based NO CONTRIBUTING ACTION	i on judgement of investigation officer)] N	IO CONTRIBUTI	NG ACTION	an judgement of invest	igation officer)	
Motor Vehicle Sealing Position: Row FRONT	Motor Vehicle Seating Position: Seat LEFT	Motor Vehicle S NOT APPLIC	Seating Position: OI CABLE	her	-	☐ Sealing	Posilion Unknown
Resimint Systems UNKNOWN	<u> </u>		elmet Use				
AIT Bag Deployed DEPLOYMENT UNKNOWN		Ŋ	ection OT EJECTED			· • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •	
Trapped Extrication		<u>1</u>	0. 2024				-
NOT TRAPPED Injury Severily Level Type	Injury Severily Level Detail	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·			mary or Most Obvious	of Body Area Inj	wed During Crash
POSSIBLE INJURY Source of Transport to Medical Facility	EMS Agency Name or ID	EMS Run Num	ber N	ladical Facility Transp	EAD onled to		
NOT TRANSPORTED Injury Description (Type of Injury Inflicted	KFD I to Primary or Most Obvious Body Area Injured	during Crash. Can	come from EMS/H	ospital records).			
HEAD/CHIN AREA PAIN			•				
aw Enforcement Suspecied Alcohol Use	e : Alcohol Test Type	Alcohol Tesle	rd	Alcohol	Test Results		
NO		TEST NOT			st Results		
aw Enforcement Suspecied Drug Use NO	Drug Test Type	Drug Tesled TEST NOT	GIVEN	Ding lea	ar (Acadila	<u> </u>	
DRIVER V03 Person Type	NM# Vehicle# Person Ty	pe Delail	 	 			
DRIVER Irst Name	Middle Name	Last Name		<u>:</u>	Suffix	Dale of Birth	Age Sex
CLYDE Address	JUSTIN Address Other	HUBBS		TCIIV	<u> </u>	01/15/1984	31 M
13053RD STW		dillon at Time of Cras	sh	KALISPE	<u>LL</u>	MT	Zîp Code 59901
(406) 314-4985 Driver License Number	[API	PARENTLY NORM		<u>-</u>	Sialus		
01 00019844115	01/15/2020 NT 02	Сомме	RCIAL DRIVER		VALID LICENSE	.'.	
iommercial Molor Vehicle Endorsements T-DOUBLE/TRIPLE TRAILER		ontrinite and		Debuse	Recommend Orive	er ReExam	-
rivers License Restrictions 1 NONE	Drivers License R NONE			NONE	wellsa Kesnichous 3		
river Distracted By NOT DISTRACTED		Vis	ver Vision Obstructi SION NOT OBS	CURED			
river Actions at Time of Crash 1 (based NO CONTRIBUTING ACTION	on Judgement of Investigation officer)	NC NC) CONTRIBUTIN	ig action	i judgement of investig		
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P087-01019-01	Kalispell Police Department	2010-212	000 ZUID-ZIZSO	โดเาณอกจกก
Motor Vehicle Sealing Position: Row FRONT	Motor Vehicle Seating Position: Seat LEFT	Motor Vehicle Sealing Position: Other NOT APPLICABLE		Sealing Position Unknown
Restraint Systems UNKNOWN		Helmet Use		
Air Bag Deployed DEPLOYMENT UNKNOWN		Ejection NOT EJECTED		
Trapped Extrication NOT TRAPPED				
Injury Seventy Level Type NO INJURY	injury Saverity Level Detail		Primary or Most Obvious	of Body Area Injured During Crash
Source of Transport to Medical Facility NOT TRANSPORTED	/ EMS Agency Name or ID	EMS Run Number Med	lical Facility Transported To	
Law Enforcement Suspected Alcohol (NO	Use Alcohol Test Type	Alcohol Tesled TEST NOT GIVEN	Alcohol Test Results	
Law Enforcement Suspected Drug Usa NO	e Drug Test Type	Drug Tested TEST NOT GIVEN	Drug Test Results	

NARRATIVE: P067-01019

Vehicles 1, 2, and 3 westbound 500 block W Center St. Vehicle 3 stopped in traffic lane for CHS employee signaling for traffic to stop so forklift could maneuver briefly onto the roadway. Vehicle 2 was westbound 500 block W Center street behind vehicle 3 and stopped behind vehicle 3. Vehicle 1 was westbound 500 block of W Center St behind vehicle 2. Driver of vehicle 1 stated he looked away briefly and when he looked to the front again, he observed other vehicles stopped in front of him and attempted to stop. Front of vehicle 1 struck the rear of vehicle 2 pushing front of vehicle 2 into the rear of vehicle 3.

Reporting Officer			
			 A 1 O
	Reporting Officer	. 1	Approving Supervis

1209	Rank SGT	Name CORBETT, B	ID Number 6046	RECORDS_	Name BETSCHART, J
Signalure			Signature	· · ·	
	M	K9		Records Print	User
			11		

Case Identifier P067-01019-01 P087-01019-01

(KALISPELL POLICE DEPARTMENT

2015-21233

2076-27258

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DIAGRAM OF ACCIDENT

AND

500 Block W. Center St.

6th Alley W